

Petition of the LADIES of LONDON and WESTMINSTER  
to the Honourable Houle of HUSBANDS

WE know you are barrast with Petitions from all Quarters of the Nation; for to whom should the miserable Subject apply himself for the Redress of his just Grievances, but to this awfull Assembly? At present you have no less than the Safety of all Europe, and that of England in particular, depending upon your Supplies and Assistance; yet you sometimes condescend to entertain your selves with Things of far less Importance, Give us leave therefore to lay our lamentable Condition before you, and to expect a relief from your generous appearing in our behalf. We demand nothing but what is highly reasonable and advantageous to the State, nothing but what the Laws of God, Nature, and the end of our Creation plead for, & next to that immediately employs your Councils at this juncture, we offer a matter of the highest Consequence that ever came within your Walls. You need not be reminded with what Scorn and contempt the Holy State of Matrimony but of late years been treated: Every nasty Scribler of the Town has pelted it in his wretched Lampoons; it has been persecuted in Sonnet, reddicul'd at Court, expos'd on the Theatre, and that so often, that the Subject is now exhausted and barren; so that if no new Effors have been lately made against our Sexes Grand Charter, we are not to ascribe it either to the good Nature or Conversion of the Men, but only to the want of fresh Matter and Argument. What afflicts us most, is to find Persons of good sense and gravity, considerable for their Estates and Fortunes, so shamefullie led aside from their Duty by the feeble Sophistry of these little unthinking Rhyming Creatures; and to see that a scurrilous Song to the Tune of a Dog with a Bottle, shall make a greater Impression upon them than all the wholesome Precepts of the Apostles put together.

One, forsooth, is mortally afraid lest his head should ake within a Fortnight or so after Marriage, and yet makes no Conscience of filling his Carcass every Night with filthy stummed Wine, which in all probability will sooner give him a Fever, than a Wife confer a pair of Horns upon him. A second professes he has an unvincible Aversion to the squeaking of Children, and rocking of Cradles, though the Son can sit a whole day at Wills, amidst the eternal Quarrels of the Neighbours, and the endless Disputes of No-Politicians? A third is apprehensive of the thing called Curtain-Lectures, as the nausious Fellow loves to talk; and yet suffer themselves to be tamely rid by common, ungrateful Hackney prostitutes. A Fourth has a great respect to his own dear person, and thinks a Wife will drain him to meer Skin and Bones, who for all that so manages himself, as to have occasion to visit Dr. Whore a Quarter. Lastly, The graver sort exclaim at the Caudels, the Pins, &

Midwinters

Midwives, the Nurses, and other Concomitants of Wedlock; they pretend the Taxes run high, and that a Spouse is an expensive Animal; little considering that they throw away more upon their dearly beloved vanities, than would maintain a Wife, and half a dozen Children.

These are the common Topicks against Matrimonie; and yet, to behold the Vanitie of these pretences, they immediatlie disappear and vanish, as soon as a good Fortune comes in their way. Show the Sparks but a rich Heiress, or an old griping Alderman's Daughter, and they soon forget Curtain lectures and Cuckoldom Consumptions and Skeltons, pins and caudles, Impetunance and Confinement, with the rest of their terrible objections. Then you hear not a Syllable of Libertie; but oh! what a blessed, what a comfortable thing is a Wife! Nay, a Widdow, though past Fiftie, and as ugly as one of the Witches in Macbeth, if she has but store of Monie, shall go down as glibbie with them, as the New Oaths of Preferment at Court; without the least wry Face or remorse of conscience; And the vain Coxcombs think themselves as happie, as if they had got both the Indies in their possession.

But though the Laitie, not to mince Matters, have almost universallie degenerated in this wicked Age, Yet we bless Heaven that our Sex has still found the Benefit of the Clergie; that the Church men have been our surest & best Friends all along. Had not these pious Gentlemen taken pitie of our condition, how manie superannuated Chamber-Maids had lain neglected, how manie languishing Farmer's Daughters gone the way of all Flesh, without propagating their kind? Whatever Prescriptions they have made in other parts of the Bible, we have to our unspeakable comfort found that they have kept constant to the Text, Increase and multiply; and indeed it was but reasonable that these People who are every Moment trumping their Jure Divino upon the World, should by their own Example support and countenance that sort of Life, which is as much Jure Divino as the Priesthood.

We never questioned, notwithstanding the unwearied Attempts of our adversaries to render Marriage contemptible both in their Writings and Conversation, but that Nature, meer Nature without any Endeavours of our own, would have reduced the Men long since to a true sense of their Dutie, had it not been for the two following Impediments: The first is Wine, which we see that are Maids have as much reason to complain of, as those that are married. 'Tis a burning shame, and it bightie concerns the wisdom of the nation to prevent it, that the young fellows of the Town should scandalouslie abandon themselves to the Bottle. They ply their Glasses too wormalie to think of anie thing else; and if the liquor happens to inspire them with anie kind Inclinations, the next Street furnishes them with store of conveniences to relieve their Appetite. And this leads us to the second Block in our way, which is the intolerable multitude of Mistresses, who to the great prejudice of the publick, divert the course of those streams, which would otherwise run in the regular Channel of matrimonie. As long as these contraband Commodities are encouraged or connived at, it cannot be expected that virtuous Women should bear a good market price, or that Marriage should flourish.

It would look like Affectation or Vanity in those of our Sex, whom the malicious World supposes to be conversant in nothing else but Books of Receipts and Romances, to acquaint so experienced and learned a Body as yours is, how highly Marriage was revered, and how industriously cultivated by the wisest Governments in the World. The Examples of Athens and Sparta are too notorious to be long insisted upon. Those were glorious places for us, poor Women, to live in; a Man there could neither be Church Warden or Constable, nay, nor be concerned in the meanest, most scoundrel Parish Offices, unless he was married. An old musty Bachelor was pointed at like a Monster, they looked upon such a one to be disaffected to the State, and therefore as constantly indicted him every Quarter Sessions, for letting his Talent lie unemployed, as now we do Jacobites, and false Retailers of News. The same Policy was observed at Rome, where the Jus trium liberorum, the privilege of those that had got three Children, was one of the greatest Favours the Emperor could bestow upon a Subject, and was courted with as vigorous an Application as a Knightsbood is now adays. By this means that victorious City arrived to the Empire of the World; And we, if we would beat the French into better manners, we must follow the same Conduct: But it grieves our hearts to consider that in a Christian, and much more in a Protestant Country, we are forced to stir up the Charity of well disposed persons by citing Pagan Examples.

We therefore humbly Petition you, that for the increase of Their Majesties Liege people, in whom the power and strength of a Nation consists, and for the utter discouragement of Celibacy and all its wicked works, you would be pleased to enact,

First, That all men of what Quality and Degree sever, should be obliged to marry as soon as they are One and Twenty; and that those persons who decline so doing, shall for their Libertie, as they are pleased to miscall it, pay yearlie to the State, which we leave to your discretion to make as great or as little as you think fit, on Moiety whereof shall go to the King towards the payment of his Armie in Flanders, and the rest to be distributed amongst poor House keepers, that have not sufficient to maintain their Wives and respective Families, by such married Officers as you shall nominate and appoint.

Secondlie, That no Excuse shall be admitted, but onlie that of natural frigidity or impotence; which that it may not be pretended when there is no just occasion for it, and likewise that impotent persons may not, to the disappointment of their Spouses, enter into the holy State of Matrimonie, there shall be erected in every Countie in England a Court of Judicature, composed of half a score experienced Matrons or Midwives, who by a writ de maritali suppellectile inspicienda, may summon or cause to be summoned, all such people as pretend the abovementioned Excuse, or are justlie suspected thereof.

Thirddie, Since it is found by experience that the generalitie of Young-men, are such Idolaters of the Bottle, and that Wine is the most powerful Rival which the Ladies have reason to be jealous of, that no person whatsoever shall be privileged to enter a Tavern who is not married, under pain of having his Wig and gilt Snuff-box confiscated Toties Quoties

Fourthlie, That everie Poet, or pretender to be a Poet, or any one that has hired a Poet to write anie Play, Satyr, Song or Lampoon, to the derogation of the Matrimonial State, shall be obliged to marrie before Lady Day next ensuing, and to make a solemn Recantation

nation of all, and everie wicked thing by him uttered in anie Play, Satyr, Song or Lamppoon to the derogation of the Matrimoniall State; that all such disaffected Papers shall be called in, and publickly burnt by the hands of twelve Citty Clergie Men's Wives, on next St. Valentine's Day.

Lastlie, That to prevent the grievous Multitudes of, and frequent resorts to Mises and Harlots, everie Person of Qualitie pretending to keep a Miss; after the commencing of this Act, shall be enjoined in order to his farther Punishment, to keep a Regiment of Foot for his Majesties Service upon the Rhine; or in case he chuses to disband her, to dispose of her in Marriage to his Footman and Groom, and allow them therewith to set up a Coffe-house. And as for the Inferior Harlots, all Justices of Peace and Constables shall execute the Laws against them.

Having thus most noble Patriots laid open our Grievances before you, we doubt not but you will take effectual care to redress them, could you condescend so low as to debate about the making Rivers Wye and Lug navigable, and will you not endeavour as much as in you lies to untie the Male-streams with the Female? Could you think it worth the while to take care of the propagation of Woods, the draining of the Fens; and the carving of Pastures in to Arable Land; and will you not much more encourage the propagation of Mankind, the draining of the superfluous Humours of the Body Politick, and provide that so many longing young Lasses shall not be unploughed, unbarrowed, and unwatered? Besides there was never a fitter occasion for such a Bill, than what offers it self at present: The mightie numbers of Men that our Wars carrie off in Flanders, with the little or no Increase at home to balance the loss; and what ought to be no small Argument with you, the few unmarried Sparks that tarrie behind, are of late grown so imperious and proud in their demands, that nothing will go down with them now but an Petition. Here are an infinite number of Advocats to incline you to be kind to our cause, Wit and Tongue, Beauty and good Nature, besides the publick Advantage, and the Protestant Religion plead for us; but what cannot fail to move even hearts of Marble, This very Petition is subscribed by Ten Thousand Green-sicknels Maidens.

That single Consideration, we know, will prevail with you to espouse our Quarrel, to restore Matrimonie to its Primitive Splendor, and lastly to destroy Celibacie, as effectually as you have done Paperie. Which will oblige your Petitioner.

This duty bound overtopey. W. R.

This Petition is subscribed by Threescore Thousand Hands, and never a cracked Maidenhead; or Wilson amongst them all.

LONDON, Printed for Mary Wilmson, the Fore-maid of the Petitioners, and sold by A. R. in Fleet street, 1693.

